

Build our
smart barbecue
work centre,
spread out your
food prep and
tool storage,
and kiss
your free time
goodbye.
You'll be on
grill duty so
often, the
cottage chores
will just have
to wait.
(Shame, that.)

ESCAPE TO BARBECUE ISLAND





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I LOVE OUTDOOR COOKING,

but it does bring up one of life's profound mysteries. At the cottage, there's a wide open lake, acres of empty land nearby, and never more than a small crowd of people around. So much outdoor space to use and enjoy, and it all somehow disappears in front of the barbecue. There's just never enough room for preparing food or getting it from the grill onto plates.

The side tables on my 'cue will barely fit a single plate or a couple of spice bottles.

In the kitchen, an island gives that flat, stable surface, versatile counter space with all-around access. This outdoor work centre offers the same utility, and stands up to the elements. With storage for charcoal or propane along with barbecue tools, and a design that allows for personalization, this island puts outdoor space where it's needed.

This project uses 1x6 cedar fence boards (which are actually $\frac{3}{4}$ " by $5\frac{1}{2}$ "), 2x2 cedar spindles (again, in real life these are $1\frac{1}{2}$ " square), and construction-grade spruce plywood. While it may look complex to build, the modular construction and pocket-hole joinery (see "The Practical Pocket Hole," p. 102) make this project suitable for all skill levels. The only tools required are a table saw, drill, mitre saw or hand saw, a pocket-hole jig, and a hot-glue gun.

Begin with front and rear assemblies

1. Rip your fence boards into 2" strips on the table saw, setting the offcuts aside to use later. Crosscut the four stiles and rails to length, then drill two pocket holes into the backside of each end of the four rails and the two shorter stiles. Next, cut four sections of 2x2

cedar spindles to 31" to make the legs, and get ready to assemble the frames.

2. Working with the components face down on a large table or the floor, attach the top and bottom rails to the long stiles, making sure the top edges are flush. Next, fasten each centre stile in place, leaving 14" between it and the long stile. Finally, fasten the frames to the legs. The rails at the open end are attached to the legs with pocket-hole screws, while the end with the stile is just glued in place using outdoor-rated wood glue and clamped until dry. Because the legs are $1\frac{1}{2}$ " thick, there will be a $\frac{3}{4}$ " offset from the stiles and rails. Attach the legs so they are flush on the back side, making sure that the front and rear assemblies are mirror images of each other.

Make two panels

1. The framed cedar-shake panels that join the front and back assemblies look great and are very easy to make. Cut two pieces of $\frac{1}{4}$ " spruce plywood to 20" by 31". Cut the stiles and rails that frame these panels, and glue and clamp them in place on the plywood. As back-up for the glue, drive a few $\frac{3}{4}$ " screws or finishing nails through the ply and into the cedar.

2. The shakes filling the frames are actually cedar construction shims adhered with hot glue. Starting with a double layer at the bottom, test-fit the shims, and trim to width with a straight edge and utility knife. I left a gap, just eyeballed, of about $\frac{1}{8}$ " between them. Once the pieces for the bottom row are cut, glue permanently in place with a couple of beads of hot glue, then repeat the process four times, trimming to width (and length where necessary) to make up the five rows of shakes, spacing the rows $5\frac{1}{2}$ " apart. Be careful to offset the shakes, so one vertical gap doesn't line up with the one below.

More pocket holes

1. The two panels attach to the front and rear frames with more pocket screws. Drill four or five evenly spaced holes down each side of the panels—putting

With your spacious island, you can relax and spread out: no more balancing plates in one hand and tongs in the other. Store charcoal, hardwood chips for smoking, and your grilling baskets right where you need them, too.

MATERIALS

All wood is $\frac{3}{4}$ "-thick cedar, except where noted

Front and rear

4 rails: 2" x 30"
2 long stiles: 2" x 31"
2 centre stiles: 2" x 27"
4 legs: $1\frac{1}{2}$ " x $1\frac{1}{2}$ " x 31"

Panels

Side and centre panels:
20" x 31", $\frac{1}{4}$ " spruce plywood
4 long stiles: 2" x 31"
4 side rails: 2" x 16"
Rear panel: $16\frac{1}{2}$ " x 31",
 $\frac{1}{4}$ " spruce plywood*
2 end rails: 2" x 20"
1 bundle cedar shims

Top

Countertop base: 24" x 36",
 $\frac{3}{4}$ " spruce plywood*
Countertop edges:
2 each of $1\frac{1}{4}$ " x 24" and
 $1\frac{1}{4}$ " x $37\frac{1}{2}$ "*

Door

3 pieces: $5\frac{1}{2}$ " x 30"

Cabinet bottom and shelves

4 bottom cleats: $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 20"
2 middle cleats: $\frac{3}{4}$ " x $18\frac{3}{8}$ "
4 shelf edges: $1\frac{1}{2}$ " x $18\frac{1}{2}$ "*
Floorboards: leftovers
Shelf slats: leftovers

HARDWARE

$\frac{1}{2}$ " copper pipe
 $\frac{3}{4}$ " copper pipe
1 pair hinges
4 casters
4 brass hooks
Shelf support pins

*oversized, trim to fit



Bring this materials list to your local TIM-BR MART. To find a location near you, click here.

A functional add-on to your grill

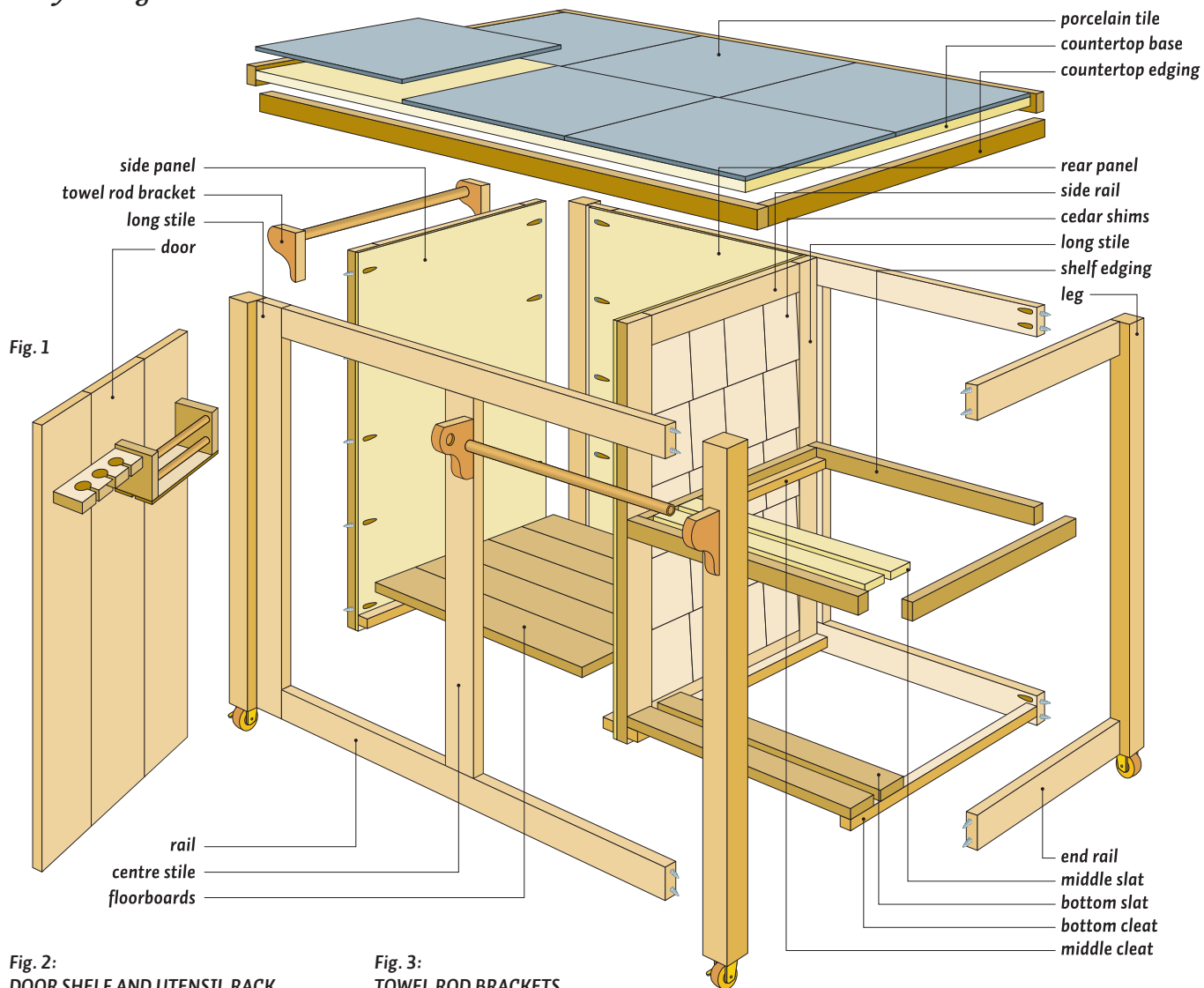


Fig. 2:
DOOR SHELF AND UTENSIL RACK

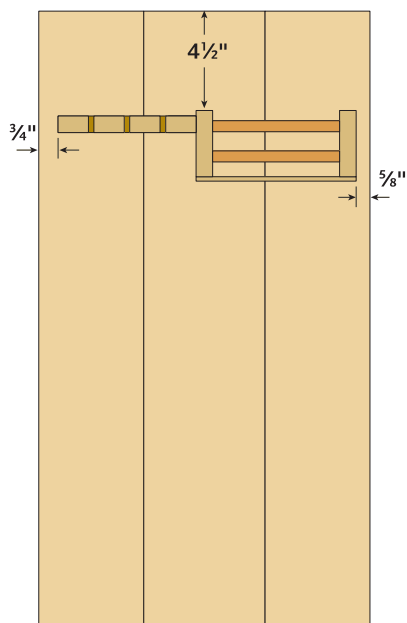


Fig. 3:
TOWEL ROD BRACKETS

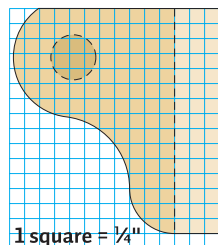
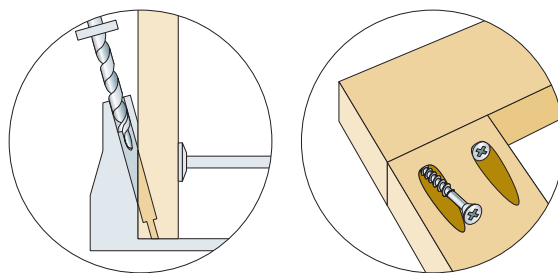


Fig. 4: POCKET-HOLE JIG



The practical pocket hole

Many DIYers have adopted pocket-hole joinery to make tight, strong joints without the know-how and tools needed for dovetails, dadoes, and the like. A pocket-hole jig lets you drill precise, steeply angled holes into pieces of wood, which can then be joined with special screws. Joints that used to take hours—and a lot of skill—can now be done in minutes with just the jig, some clamps and screws, and a drill. You'll find pocket-hole jigs at most woodworking supply stores, with prices ranging from \$30 for a basic jig (all that you need for this project) to \$150 for one with extra features, such as multiple drill ports and a built-in clamping system.

the holes on the plywood side, of course. Apply a thin layer of outdoor-rated wood glue down the edges of the side panel and then secure it in place between the front and rear frames with the pocket screws. Attach the centre panel the same way, making sure it is centred on the stile.

2. Attach two more rails at the top and bottom of the open end. Cut to length, drill two pocket holes (from the back) per end, and secure between the legs.

3. The rear panel is just a 31"-long piece of plywood trimmed to fit between the side and centre panels (16½" in my case, but measure first for a perfect fit). It's glued in place, secured with pocket-hole screws from inside the cabinet, and then the outside is covered in shims, applied the same way as with the other panels.

Bottom and top

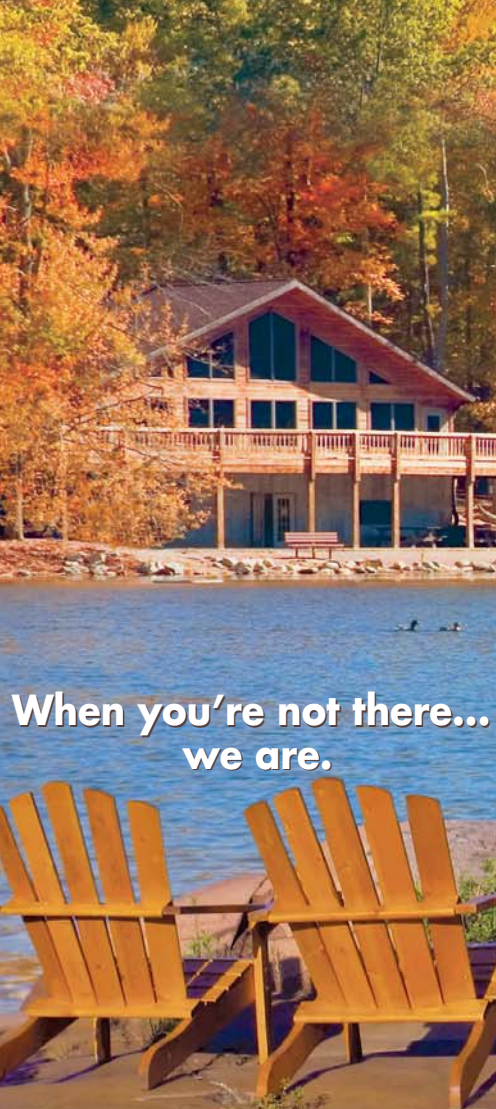
1. The cabinet floorboards are simply more ¾" cedar pieces, sitting on ¾" by ¾" cleats that are glued and nailed to the bottom of the cart, ¾" below the top edge of the rails. The width and spacing of the boards isn't crucial here, so just use what you have on hand and trim your boards to length. Evenly space the slats and nail them to the cleats with 1¼" finishing nails.

2. The countertop base is ¾" plywood, cut to the exact dimensions of your tiles, then screwed in place with #8 x 1½" wood screws driven through the top and into the frame of the cabinet. While I really wanted the look of slate tiles, I chose to use porcelain tiles for this surface instead. Porcelain tiles are durable and far more uniform than slate tile would be, but still have a look and texture similar to natural stone. Because porcelain tiles, unlike ceramic, are moisture-proof, they're not affected by freezing, though I wouldn't leave the work centre out all winter.

Note: Don't trust the sizes on the tile box. Mine were listed as 12" by 12", but they actually measured closer to 11¾" square. Lay out all of your tiles on an oversized piece of plywood and trace the outside for an accurate measurement. >>

Great pretenders: On top, frost- and heatproof porcelain tiles stand in for a pricey stone surface. The side and back walls aren't made of rustic wood shakes, but cheap-as-borscht cedar shims glued in place. And the solid copper hardware? Nothing more than polished and lacquered plumbing pipe.





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3. To finish up the top, glue the tiles in place with clear silicone caulking and edge the top with some of the offcuts you set aside earlier. Trim them to length and hold in place with wood glue and 1½" finishing nails. It is a good idea to also apply a small amount of silicone to the edges of the tiles as you put them in place. By gluing the tiles together like this, you'll prevent water from leaking into the small cracks between the tiles and possibly harming the plywood substrate.

The door

The door starts as three 30" lengths of 1x6, edge-glued and sanded flat. Choose the flattest, straightest pieces you can find, and clean up the mating edges with a pass on the table saw, or a few strokes of a hand plane, to ensure a good fit between boards before gluing. If desired, you can add two rails, secured with screws to the back of the door, to ensure it stays flat. Once the door is built, trim it to a final size of 15" by 28" and hang it with a pair of brass or stainless steel standard cabinet hinges.

Final touches

1. This is the fun part. Use the scraps and any stuff you have lying around the cottage, along with a healthy dose of imagination, to make up shelves, holders, handles, and custom touches to suit your needs. My handles and towel rods are made of old copper pipe that I cleaned up with fine steel wool and sealed with a coat of clear lacquer. I cut their support brackets to a pleasing shape with a jig saw, then drilled ⅜"-deep holes in them with a Forstner or spade bit. The blocks, with pipe in position, are glued and screwed in place. Two notes: Because the right front leg sits proud of the stiles, its bracket needs to be ¾" shorter than the others. Next, drill the holes ⅜" larger than the nominal size of the pipe for a good fit. For ½" pipe, you need a ⅝" hole; for ¾" pipe, you need ⅞".

2. The shelf and rack inside my door can hold spice bottles, a barbecue igniter, and various tools and baskets. To make the rack, I used a 2" by 6¼" piece of scrap, into which I drilled three ⅞" holes and then cut slots with a handsaw. The shelf

consists of two 3" by 3" blocks joined together with 6½" lengths of ½" copper pipe, and two 1¼" by 7¼" strips of ¼" scrap nailed to the bottom. The parts are then attached to the door with glue and, you guessed it, pocket screws. Under the rack, I also installed four solid brass hooks for added storage options.

3. The middle shelf is made entirely of scrap left over from cutting the 2"-wide stock earlier. Build a frame with pieces standing on edge to fit inside the opening, then attach the slats with a couple of cleats and some finishing nails. You can attach the shelf permanently with four 1½" screws or, as I did, use ¼" brass shelf supports for it to rest on. If the shelf is removable, just remember to make it about ⅛" narrower than the gap, so you can get it in and out easily. The bottom shelf is made in a similar way, with slats resting on cleats.

Finish up and make it roll

1. The entire cabinet is finished with a mix of 50 per cent boiled linseed oil and 50 per cent naphtha or mineral spirits. (I prefer naphtha as it dries faster.) Brush on a heavy coat, allow it to soak in for 20-30 minutes, and wipe off any excess with a lint-free cloth. Allow the finish to cure for 24 hours, then repeat. Because this is a penetrating finish, repairing any scratches or general wear is as easy as applying another coat, letting it soak into the damaged area for a few minutes, and then wiping off any excess.

2. The final step is to add casters. While they are completely optional, they make it much easier to move the island around the deck. Because your barbecue island will be exposed to weather, solid brass casters are a good choice. The ones I used are small in diameter; if you plan to move your cart around a lot, or your deck boards are quite uneven, you may want larger ones. To attach a caster, drill a ¼" hole in the bottom of each leg, then insert the caster's stem and secure with the supplied brass screws.

Flip your island back over and roll it to its place of honour on the deck. Load it up with your grilling essentials and start planning dinner. You will appreciate the extra space, and your barbecue's side shelves can now serve a more noble purpose: holding a cold beverage while you attend to the steaks. 🍷